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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the ease or difficulty of learning vocabulary words in a second language looks at a variety of issues in second language instruction. Research on factors in vocabulary learning is discussed, focusing on such factors as similarity in form and morphology, deceptive morphological structure, different syntactic patterning in the native language, differences in the classification of experience in the first and second languages, abstractness, specificity, negative value, connotations nonexistent in the native language, differences in the pragmatic meaning of near-synonyms and first-language translation equivalents, the learning burden of synonyms, and the apparent rulelessness of collocations. It is argued that word learnability (i.e., the ease or difficulty of learning a particular word) can serve as a guideline to the teacher in: (1) the selection and presentation (quantity, grouping, language of presentation, isolation or context) of words to be taught; (2) facilitation of long-term memorization (through meaningful tasks, mnemonic techniques, rote learning, and reactivation); (3) development of self-learning strategies, and (4) assessment of vocabulary knowledge. (Author/MSE)

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Ease and difficulty in vocabulary learning: some teaching implications

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This paper discusses the relationship between ease/difficulty in learning particular words and some issues in the teaching of vocabulary.

Some factors that interfere with learning a word are claimed to be the following: similarity of form between the word and other words (embrace/embarrass, price/prize); morphological similarity between it and other words (industrial/industrious, respectable/respective); deceptive morphological structure (infallible); different syntactic patterning in L1; differences in the classification of experience between L1 and L2 (one-to-many correspondence, partial overlap in meaning, metaphorical extension, lexical voids, multiplicity of meaning); abstractness; specificity; negative value; connotations non-existent in L1; differences in the pragmatic meaning of near synonyms and of L1 translation equivalents; the learning burden of synonyms; the apparent rulelessness of collocations.

It is argued that word learnability (ease/difficulty in learning a particular word) can serve as a guideline to the following: the selection of words to be taught; their presentation (quantity, grouping, language of presentation, isolation/context issue); facilitating long-term memorization (meaningful tasks, mnemonic techniques, rote learning, reactivation); developing strategies for self-learning; assessing vocabulary knowledge.

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Introduction

The issue of ease and difficulty in vocabulary learning, interesting as it may be in its own right, is also of importance to the language teacher, who has to make various decisions about ways of enriching the learners' vocabularies. As in the case of grammar, where different teaching techniques are applied to different grammatical structures, depending, among other things, on whether the structure in question is difficult or easy for a particular group of learners, so in vocabulary teaching, word learnability, i.e. the extent to which a certain word, or group of words, is easy or difficult to learn, may determine our approach to teaching it.

This paper will relate some research findings about word learnability to several decisions a teacher may need to make regarding vocabulary teaching. Specifically, it will be shown how the knowledge of what makes words easy or difficult may affect the selection of words to be taught, their presentation, some ways in which long-term memorization can be facilitated, developing some strategies for self-learning and the assessment of vocabulary knowledge. First, the notions of word knowledge (what is involved in learning a word) and word learnability (the factors which may interfere with each component of word knowledge) will be presented. Then, the application of word learnability to teaching will be discussed.

Word knowledge and word learnability

Since a word is a complex of features (phonological, orthographic, morphological, syntactic, semantic) and since a word is related to other words in a language, the knowledge of a word would imply familiarity with the above features and with the lexical relations of the word. By way of summary, the following can be regarded as components of word knowledge (see also Richard 1976, Nation 1988).

a. Form: recognizing the spoken and the written form; being able to pronounce and spell the word correctly.

b. Word structure: recognizing the basic free morpheme and the bound morphemes; being able to produce some derivations of the word.

c. Syntactic pattern in a phrase/sentence.

d. Meaning: referential, affective (the connotation of the word), pragmatic (the suitability of the word in a particular situation).

e. Lexical relations of the word with other words, such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy.

f. Common collocations.

The rest of this section will briefly survey various factors which can affect word learnability , i.e. the ease or difficulty with which a word is learnt. The focus will be on difficulty inducing factors in the acquisition of each component of word knowledge. (For a detailed discussion and research survey see Laufer 1988 and 1989).

Form

Words with phonemes non-existent in L1 may be difficult to perceive correctly; in production, they are often mispronounced or altogether avoided by learners who are overconscious of their pronunciation errors.

Also similarity of form, spoken and/or written, between words may result in confusion of the two words, in comprehension and in production. For example, 'available' is often misinterpreted as 'valuable', 'embrace' as 'embarrass', 'simulate' as 'stimulate.' In production, the confusion of pairs like 'thinking/sinking', 'price/prize', 'cute/acute' may convey a message altogether different from the intended one.

Word structure

Many pairs/groups of words have an identical root (often polysemous) and different affixes; each of the words has a different meaning, e.g. 'comprehensible/comprehensive'. A learner who is familiar with only one meaning of, for example, 'industry' may interpret 'industrious' as 'industrial'. Moreover, even if the learner has come across the two adjectives the similarity of structure may make it hard to remember which is which. Additional examples of similar errors (both in production and comprehension) are the confusions of 'sensible/sensitive/sensual', 'exhausted/exhaustive', 'respectable/respective', etc. (For a detailed discussion of confusions of words of similar forms, phonological and morphological, see Laufer 1985).

The use of morphology, helpful as it may often be, will nevertheless lead to false interpretation when words look as if they were analysable, but in fact are not, e.g. infallible = in + fall + ible, outgrow = grow outside. In production too, forming words by adding up familiar morphemes will not always result in a correct word. Thus one cannot 'overthrow' a ball since 'over' here does not mean 'on the top/across' as in 'overfly'; nor can one watch an 'anteview' on the TV even though 'ante' is synonymous with 'pre' in 'prenatal' and 'antenatal'.

Syntactic behavior.

Learning the syntactic behaviour of a word may be difficult when it differs from the syntactic pattern of an equivalent word in L1. The following examples of errors illustrate the difficulty: *depend in, *enjoy from - these result from the use of Hebrew preposition equivalents with English prepositional verbs or with verbs which do not take any preposition; *advices, *furnitures are the result of the Hebrew translation equivalents being countable nouns; sky/life/water + verb in plural (*the water are) is transferring the syntactic characteristic of plural from Hebrew (the above words are plural only in Hebrew).

False analogy with other L2 forms can also lead to errors in the words' syntactic behaviour as in *reply a letter (cf. answer a letter), *finished to work (cf. wanted to work). Clearly, the errors mentioned in this section are in production only, since in reading or listening the correct structure will appear.

Meaning.

Most of the problems in vocabulary learning pertain to the acquisition of meaning. Problems with mastering the referential meaning occur when the semantic areas covered by a word in L2 and its near equivalent in L1 do not overlap: one word in L1 may cover the areas referred to by several words in L2, e.g. 'esteem', 'estimate', 'evaluate', 'appreciate' = 'lehaarich' (Hebrew); or the meaning of a word in L2 may only partially overlap with the meaning in L1 and while of the words (in L1 and L2) has additional meaning, e.g. 'play' = 'lesachek', 'lenagen' (Hebrew), 'lesachek' is also 'act', and 'act' is also 'letafked'. In the first instance, one-to-many correspondence, the learner has to choose the correct semantic grid from a distinction non-existent in his L1. Hence errors like *I can't appreciate a cruel person.(1) In the case of partial overlap in meaning, an additional difficulty may occur in comprehension, e.g. 'He is a good player' may be mistaken for 'He is a good actor'.

Multiplicity of meaning non-existent in L1 may result in the learner's reluctance to accept a meaning additional to the already familiar one. Some of my own students failed to realise that the familiar meanings of 'since' - 'from the time when', 'while' = 'when', 'abstract' - opposite of 'concrete' did not make sense in text context where they meant 'because', 'in spite of the fact that', 'summary', respectively. In production, they would rather use 'because', in spite of the fact that', 'summary' to avoid the use of 'unreasonable' polysemy.(2)

Metaphors and idioms non existent in L1 are often difficult to interpret because of their opaqueness of meaning. However, even when the learner is familiar with the metaphor/idiom, he would often avoid using it settling for a non metaphorical/idiomatic equivalent (e.g. 'postpone' for 'put off').(3)

Lack of comprehension and avoidance in production have also been observed in the case of lexical voids. Thus words like 'cosy', 'quaint', 'lap' cannot be adequately translated into Hebrew and the Hebrew speaking learner must acquire not only a new word but a new concept with it.

As in the case of referential meaning, spécial difficulty may arise when one word in L1 can be represented by several words in L2, each one with a different connotation. When the affective distinction is not made in L1, the learner may not feel the need to make it in L2 either. Thus, he may refer to a thin person as either 'skinny' or 'slim', to a woman as either 'womanish' or 'womanly' unaware of the differences in message conveyed by the different words.

As for the pragmatic meaning, difficulties may often arise under two conditions. (a) The learner is not aware of the stylistic differences between synonyms and overuses one of them, e.g. 'approximately' instead of 'about', 'around', 'more or less' in 'There are 'approximately' twenty kids here', which will make the sentence sound unecessarily formal. (b) The learner may carry over L1 conventions into L2, e.g. in response to a mistake, the expression 'you're wrong' sounds blunt and impolite in English, but not in Hebrew.

Additional features of meaning that have been found to induce difficulty are abstractness, specificity and negative values.

The new word and other words

The lexical relation of synonymy may be problematic when words are synonymous in one context but not in another. The learner, in his attempt to simplify his learning task, may learn one synonym and overuse it in the wrong context, or having learnt both of them, he may not remember which synonym is used in which context. For example, 'strong' and 'powerful' are synonymous in the case of an 'argument', but tea is only 'strong', engine - 'powerful' and a strong man is not a 'powerful' man.

Collocations in general, not only of synonymous words, may present a problem where the L1 meaning equivalent uses different collocations. These combinations of words are most often transparent in comprehension, but when they have to be used, errors often occur. Hebrew speaking learners tend to say *bring examples, *high education, *stand in front of a problem, simply translating their L1 collocations. The teacher can hardly explain such errors by reference to rules, and dictionaries do not necessarily provide all the collocations in their examples of the word's use.

Summary

In section 2, components of word knowledge were listed and factors interfering with their acquisition were briefly reviewed. The knowledge of a word was taken to be the knowledge of its form, structure, syntactic behaviour, meaning (referential, affective, pragmatic), and its relation with other words. The factors that interfere with learning a word were claimed to be the following: difficult pronounceability, similarity of form between the word and other words, similarity of morphology between it and other words, deceptive morphological structure, different syntactic patterning in L1, differences in lexical gridding between L1 and L2 (one-to-many correspondence, partial overlap in meaning), multiplicity of meaning and metaphors/idioms non existent in L1, lexical voids, connotations non-existent in L1; differences in the pragmatic meaning of near synonyms and of L1

translation equivalents, abstractness, specificity, negative value, partial synonymy and the apparent rulelessness of collocation.

Section 3 will discuss the teaching implications of each and difficulty in vocabulary learning.

Teaching Implications.

Selection

Incidental learning or explicit teaching?

The lexicon of the learner can be enriched in two ways: through the addition of words which have been explicitly taught to him in the classroom and practised subsequently; or by 'picking up' words incidentally, through mere exposure to listening and reading material. An unknown word is encountered several times, its meaning is worked out in context, later on it is recognized as familiar and sometimes is even used in speech or writing.

It is questionable, however, if difficult words (as defined in the previous section) could be simply 'picked up' and used correctly. For example, the Hebrew speaking learner may understand 'estimate' in the sentence 'The insurance agent estimated the damage of fire', learn the form and decide to use it in speech or writing. In all likelihood he will extend its use to include 'esteem', 'appreciate', 'evaluate', as all the four words are represented by one word in Hebrew ('lehaarich'). Or, even if the meaning of ' 'affect' is worked out correctly in context, without subsequent practice, it is likely to be confused with a similarly sounding 'effect'.

If the teacher is used to relying on incidental vocabulary learning of his students, it may be more realistic to be less reliant in the case of difficult words. These may need explicit teaching and constant reinforcement.

Criteria for selection.

The principles which have been used in the selection of vocabulary for teaching are the following: frequency, which rests on the assumption that the most frequent words are also the most useful; availability, which claims that words used by a high proportion of native speakers in particular situations are the most useful for foreign learners; coverage, which claims that words of general meaning which can be used in many situations (e.g. go, put, get old, young) are the most useful; range, which assumes that words distributed evenly in many registers are the most useful for general purposes.

In addition to the above mentioned criteria, learnability could also be taken into account in the selection of words. When words are easy to learn they should be taught even if, on the basis of the frequency/range principles, they would not be considered useful. Cognates, structurally related words to already familiar words, words with exact L1 equivalent - these may require little learning effort and at the same time increase the communicative ability of the learner considerably. Since the content of human communication is very often unpredictable, the learner may want to resort to words other than most frequent, or those with widest range, coverage and availability. Any increase in the number of words he possesses will be beneficial in both comprehension and production.

Some of the difficult words should be introduced fairly early as well, even if they do not happen to rate very highly on frequency list, in order to prevent, or reduce the chance of error. For example, if the word 'comfortable' was taught to Hebrew-speaking learners, it would be wise to introduce 'convenient' fairly soon after that so that the mistaken use of 'comfortable' for 'convenient' could be prevented (both words are translated by one word in Hebrew - 'noah'). After 'while' in the sense of 'when' has been learnt, it is desirable to introduce the other meaning of 'while' - 'although' even if the learner knows the word 'although' and therefore can express or understand the notion of contrast in English. This

may be desirable because learners tend to assign familiar meanings to words even when these meanings do not make sense in context (Laufer & Bensoussan, 1982). Therefore, familiarizing the learner with both meanings of polysemes/homonyms might prevent future errors of interpretation.

Presentation.

The number of words per lesson

One question that teachers often ask themselves is how many new items should be introduced in one lesson (a 60 minute period, for example). Gairns and Redman (1986) suggest to aim for 8-12 productive items but point out that they may not be retained.

The number of words that can be taught in a lesson depends on the type of words presented, i.e. on the amount of learning effort required in mastering the new words. Easy words can be introduced in much larger quantities than the more difficult ones. Words like cognates, derivatives of known words, metaphorical extensions related to familiar literal meanings (e.g. 'head of department', 'foot of a mountain'), concrete items which are easily illustrated - these will require less time for explanation and practice than the difficult words and less effort in memorization as they are related to already familiar forms and meanings. There is no reason why this should not be taken advantage of to enrich the learner's vocabulary with more than 12 words per lesson if possible.

Grouping words.

It is common practice nowadays to group words by meaning relationship in the course of teaching so as to illustrate the organised nature of vocabulary. Words that are presented can be related by subject matter (e.g. 'taking an exam'); by similarity of meaning features (e.g. pretty, beautiful, handsome, lovely, attractive); by lexical relations: synonyms (shallow, superficial), antonyms (cry, laugh), superordinate and cohyponyms (vehicle, car, train).

As mentioned in Nation (1988), new items are better retained if unrelated in meaning while new words sharing features of meaning are likely to be confused. Therefore, grouping words into lexical sets would be more efficient if the set contained already known words and, in addition, only few new ones related in meaning rather than presenting a whole set of new words similar to one another as in feminine, effeminate, womanly, womanish.

A similar principle of grouping will operate with words similar in form since, as mentioned earlier, form similarity may interfere with successful learning. Thus, it would be less effective to introduce 'cancel', 'conceal', 'counsel', 'council' together than introducing each one at a time and at a later occasion practising the distinction between them.

Language of presentation.

In his survey article on vocabulary learning, Nation (1982) provides research evidence which states that, at least after the non-advanced learners, translation of the new words, or translation in addition to explanation in L2 is a better method of presenting the words than explaining them in L2 by using synonyms, or definitions.

However, in the case of words whose semantic areas do not overlap with L1, mere translation would not suffice because part of the meaning will not be captured by it. Some componential analysis, on the other hand, may be helpful in this case. For example, to explain the difference between 'order', 'invite', 'book' to the Hebrew speaker, who has only one word in Hebrew for the three words in English, the distinction could be made as follows: invite (+ person), book(+ place), order(+ things). As for lexical voids, it is only obvious that no translation can be found and the concept itself has to be explained. Translation alone is insufficient when a word is polysemous in L1 but not in L2. The danger there is that one of the meaning equivalents in L2 may be extended to cover the other meaning represented by the same word in L1. Thus a translation of 'overlap' into the Hebrew 'lachfof' has

resulted in *I overlapped my hair, as 'lachfof' is also used for 'washing hair' and the learner was trying to use a different word for 'wash'.

Thus, translation is indeed a useful method of presenting new words whenever one or several translation equivalents indeed exist. The teacher should, however, be aware of the various incongruencies in lexical gridding between L1 and L2 in order to supplement the translation whenever necessary.

Words in lists and words in context.

Most teachers today consider it only natural to present new words in context since they believe that context is helpful in providing the full range of meaning and also that words studied in context are better retained. Research, however, shows that words studied in isolation are retained quite well, in large quantities and over a long period of time (for a review of research, see Nation 1982).

The information about the learnability of words could serve as a guideline in deciding which words are best taught in context and which can be presented in isolation. Words similar in form to other words can be confused even in context (e.g. industrial/industrious, affect/effect). Therefore, presenting them in context and having learners err may prove a useful learning activity as the learners will realise that these words are potential troublemakers and deserve special attention. The same is true in the case of words with multiple meanings in L2 and not in L1 (e.g. since, while, abstract, which are not polysemous in Hebrew). If the learner is made aware of his tendency to assign the familiar meaning to a word even if it makes no sense in a particular context, this awareness may reduce future error. Context is also helpful in clarifying the connotation of a word where translation fails to do so. Thus, since, the difference between 'feminine', 'effiminate', 'womanish' cannot be captured by the Hebrew translation ('nashi' for all the three words); context, however, is one

of the ways of doing so. As for lexical voids, there can be no escape from providing a suitable context for the new concept that does not exist in L1.

Facilitating memorization.

Processing of meaning in context.

Recently, some methodologists have been emphasizing the need for 'mental gymnastics' - a range of activities which require the learner to analyse and process language deeply; these in turn are claimed to be beneficial in committing information, in our case new words, to long term memory. (See, for example, Van Parreren and Schouten-Van Parreren, 1981).

According to the authors, presentation of new words in context and asking students to work out their meaning would involve them in deep semantic processing, which, in turn, would reinforce memorization.(4)

Word organisation exercises,

A well developed lexicon, of a native speaker or advanced foreign learner, is claimed to be organised semantically (Hatch 1983). It is possible that conscious organisation of words on the basis of meaningful links will reinforce the semantic network of the learner's lexicon. In such an exercise, the learner is required to take a group of already familiar words (either from a given list, or from his memory) and organise them as required by the teacher, e.g. 'people engaged in the teaching profession' category will include: teacher, professor, tutor, lecturer, instructor, master. The same group could then be arranged on the basis of social prestige and/or the importance for the education of a person.

The activities described above are useful for all types of words. However, as language teachers can devote only a limited amount of time to vocabulary in the framework of a language course, I would suggest that such activities be reserved specially for difficult words.

One of the cases where such practice could be helpful is sets of words which divide the semantic area in question differently in L1 and in L2, e.g. the category 'strange and peculiar' which includes 'strange', 'odd', 'peculiar' 'queer', 'funny', 'curious', 'fishy', 'quaint'. In Hebrew, 'quaint' is a void and the other words can all be translated by two words only ('muzar', 'meshune'). Another useful exercise is a tree diagram which categorizes 'limbs' into 'arms', 'hands', 'feet', 'legs' since the Hebrew speaking learner has one expression for 'hand' and 'arm' and one for 'foot' and 'leg'. Another useful organization exercise could be grouping some phrasal verbs with the same particle where the particle has the same semantic function. For example, 'up' can indicate growing intensity; thus 'speed up' 'cheer up', 'speak up', 'brighten up', 'colour up' could be practised together; so could 'clear off', 'sleep off', wipe off' 'wear off', 'cross off', where 'off' expresses disappearance.

Mnemonic techniques.

One way of committing a word to memory is to try and link it to another word (usually in L1) which resembles the new one in form, meaning, or both. (For a review of research see Cohen 1987). The supporters of the mnemonic method have argued that enrichment by associations will lead to better retention. Even though results of research are encouraging it seems that one group of words is not amenable to this technique - words of similar form, whether it is sound, script or morphology. This is so because the key word the learner will select to link to the new word in L2 may also resemble the other L2 word which is similar in form, e.g. the Hebrew 'berez' could be linked to 'embarrass' or to 'embrace', 'morah' - to 'moral' or 'morale'. In such cases, the key word is L1 may contribute to confusing the two L2 words rather than facilitate memorization of each one.

Reactivation

Whatever technique issued in learning a word, the learner's memory has to be reactivated from time to time. That is why recurrent practice of words is of utmost importance with all types of words - easy and especially the difficult ones which are prone to error and avoidance.

In the course of reactivating words, it may be useful to put, side by side, words that are likely to be confused as such an activity may highten the learner's awareness of the potential errors. Thus, in an exercise where the correct word is to be inserted, 'conceal' and 'cancel' could be presented together; 'slim', 'skinny', 'thin'; 'comfortable' and 'convenient'. The first pair is likely to be confused because of the similarity in form; the second group and the third pair - because of the different classification of the semantic fields in question in Hebrew. In an exercise where the learner is asked to provide the meaning of the underlined words, the words practised should often be polysemes, homonyms, idioms, words with deceptive morphology, etc. In an exercise on collocations, the learner may be asked to choose between the correct and incorrect collocation which is the L1 equivalent, e.g. '30% of high school graduates want high/higher education.'

Developing strategies for self-learning

Guessing in context

As vocabulary is an open set and not a closed system of a limited amount of rules, learning all the words is an impossible task. Moreover, some low frequency and low range words may not deserve much learning effort as the chance of meeting them is small. Therefore, an important skill for the learner's future comprehension tasks is guessing unknown words in context. The following clues can be helpful in guessing: (a) clues in the word itself, such as morphology or resemblance to words in familiar languages; (b) clues in the words immediate context: what part of speech it is in the sentence, what words it

collocates with, whether the sentence contains a description or a definition of the word; (c) clues in wider context: the general meaning of the paragraph, the relationship between the clause/sentence with the unknown word and the other sentences in the paragraph, such as cause and effect, contrast, inclusion, etc., and also other word's which, though remote from the unknown word, may nevertheless, be its synonyms or paraphrase; (d) extratextual knowledge, i.e topic familiarity .

Work on deceptively transparent words (Laufer 1987) shows that in the case of polysemes/homonyms, idioms, synforms (words of similar form) and false cognates, the learner tends to ignore the context, immediate and wider and relies on what seems to him the knowledge of the word itself e.g. 'infallible' was interpreted as 'something that cannot fall', 'since' - as 'from the time when' even though in context it meant 'because'.

Knowing the problematicity of the deceptively transparent words, the teachers may warn the learners not to rely on word morphology too much and not to make conclusions about the sentence meaning on the basis of the sum of meanings of the individual words as some of these words are 'pseudofamiliar', i.e. they look familiar, but in fact are not.

Dictionary use.

The problem of 'pseudofamiliar' words suggests that dictionaries should be used more widely than it is often advocated. In comprehension, if a word looks familiar but the sentence makes peculiar sense, or no sense in the wider context the learner should be encouraged to consult a dictionary.

In writing, instead of merely underlining the wrong use of problematic words, the teacher could require the learner to look up each of them in the dictionary and practice its use. Such consistent use of the dictionary is likely to develop in the learner awareness of the

possible pitfalls that words may create and the help that can be provided by a good dictionary.

Testing.

Diagnostic.

A vocabulary test may aim to find out whether the learner knows the particular words he has been taught. In such a test, the teacher selects the items from the inventory of the words that have been taught. This selection may be aided by what is known about word learnability . Just as problematic grammatical structures are tested more often than the simple ones, so could the difficult words. Moreover, if the format of the test is multiple choice, the distractors could include some errors which are typically induced by the difficult words e.g. Could you ------two seats for us? (order, book, invite). It's difficult to --------- feelings of disappointment (console, cancel, conceal, council).

Proficiency.

A test may try to find out how many words the testee knows altogether. Such proficiency tests select a representative sample from each 1000 words in frequency lists; the learner who knows the sample from the second 1000, for example, is assumed to possess a vocabulary of 2000 words; if he has correct answers to the items in the fifth thousand, he knows 5000 words, etc. (Read and Nation 1986). Awareness of word's ease/difficulty could contribute to the construction of the vocabulary proficiency tests. The sample at each level is claimed to be representative of that level (for example, it includes no compound words no words with capital letters, no words related in meaning). To be truly representative, the sample should also not include words which are particularly difficult, or particularly easy as they may not be indicative of the knowledge of most words at the tested level.

Summary.

Section 3 (Teaching Implications) has dealt with the relationship between word learnability and some teaching activities. It was shown how the knowledge which words are easy/difficult to learn may affect our selection and presentation of vocabulary, some ways of facilitating the learners' memorization of words, developing their self-learning and the assessment of vocabulary knowledge. It was suggested that easy words should be taught early even if they are not frequent; that some difficult error-prone words should also be introduced quite early. In presentation, the number of words to be taught at one lesson was claimed to depend on the number of easy and difficult words in the lesson; in grouping words it was suggested that difficult words should be grouped with already familiar ones; that the presentation of difficult words will be beneficial if both translation and explanation of the words in context are used. As far as memorization is concerned, meaning processing, organization activities and frequent reactivation were suggested as possible aid for difficult words, while mnemonic techniques were questioned in the case of words of similar form to other words in L2. With regard to self-learning, awareness of 'pseudofamiliar' words and more frequent use of dictionaries were claimed to be necessary. In testing, it was suggested that the more difficult words should be tested more frequently, that the distractors should include errors induced by these words, and that, in vocabulary proficiency tests, level samples should include neither too easy nor too difficult words.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of incongruencies in lexical 'gridding' see Dagut (1977).

2. The concept of 'unreasonable' polysemy is explained and illustrated in Levenston (1978).

3. A detailed study of avoidance of phrasal verbs (Dagut & Laufer 1985) is a case in point.

4. This approach to lexical guessing is somewhat controversial. It is doubtful whether guessing unknown words is always successful (see Bensoussan & Laufer 1984), or whether it plays a significant part in memorization (Hulstijn 1987).

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